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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 120815345-3525-02]

RIN 0648-XD988

Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic; 2015 Commercial Accountability Measure and Closure for the South Atlantic

Lesser Amberjack, Almaco Jack, and Banded Rudderfish Complex

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements accountability measures (AMs) for the commercial sector for the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex in the South Atlantic for the 2015 fishing year through this temporary rule. Commercial landings for the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex, as estimated by the Science and Research Director, are projected to reach their combined commercial annual catch limit (ACL) on June 23, 2015. Therefore, NMFS closes the commercial sector for this complex on June 23, 2015, through the remainder

of the fishing year in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic. This closure is necessary to protect the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish resources.

DATES: This rule is effective 12:01 a.m., local time, June 23, 2015, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2016.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Catherine Hayslip, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727-824-5305, e-mail: *catherine.hayslip@noaa.gov*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The snapper-grouper fishery of the South Atlantic, which includes the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex, is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). The FMP was prepared by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and is implemented under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) by regulations at 50 CFR part 622.

The combined commercial ACL for the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex is 189,422 lb (85,920 kg), round weight. Under 50 CFR 622.193(l)(1)(i), NMFS is required to close the commercial sector for the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex when the commercial ACL has been reached, or is projected to be reached,

by filing a notification to that effect with the Office of the Federal Register. NMFS has determined that the commercial sector for this complex is projected to reach the ACL on June 23, 2015. Therefore, this temporary rule implements an AM to close the commercial sector for the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex in the South Atlantic, effective 12:01 a.m., local time June 23, 2015.

The operator of a vessel with a valid commercial vessel permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper having lesser amberjack, almaco jack, or banded rudderfish on board must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such species prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, June 23, 2015. During the closure, the bag limit specified in 50 CFR 622.187(b) (8) and the possession limits specified in 50 CFR 622.187(c) apply to all harvest or possession of lesser amberjack, almaco jack, or banded rudderfish in or from the South Atlantic EEZ. These bag and possession limits apply in the South Atlantic on board a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested, *i.e.*, in state or Federal waters. During the closure, the sale or purchase of lesser amberjack, almaco jack, or banded rudderfish taken from the EEZ is prohibited. The prohibition on sale or

purchase does not apply to the sale or purchase of lesser amberjack, almaco jack, or banded rudderfish that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, June 23, 2015, and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor.

Classification

The Regional Administrator, Southeast Region, NMFS, has determined this temporary rule is necessary for the conservation and management of the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex, a component of the South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery, and is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable laws.

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.193(1)(1)(i) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

These measures are exempt from the procedures of the Regulatory Flexibility Act because the temporary rule is issued without opportunity for prior notice and comment.

This action responds to the best scientific information available. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds that the need to immediately implement this action to close the commercial sector for the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex constitutes good cause to waive the requirements to provide prior notice and opportunity

for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth in 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), as such procedures are unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Such procedures are unnecessary because the rule itself has been subject to notice and comment, and all that remains is to notify the public of the closure. Such procedures are contrary to the public interest because of the need to immediately implement this action to protect the lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish complex since the capacity of the fishing fleet allows for rapid harvest of the commercial ACL. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment would require time and would potentially result in a harvest well in excess of the established commercial ACL.

For the aforementioned reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effectiveness of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: June 12, 2015

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director,

Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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